

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 559

By White D

A RESOLUTION to recognize and commend the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly take great pride in acknowledging those venerable entities that engender curiosity and critical thinking through experiential learning; and

WHEREAS, one such organization is the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring, a hands-on environmental, cultural, and educational museum located in the heart of Middle Tennessee, which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year; and

WHEREAS, each year, more than 120,000 children and families visit the Discovery Center, exploring exhibits and participating in programs that promote STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) education; visitors also enjoy the protected Murfree Spring wetlands, a natural habitat for a variety of fish, amphibians, and birds, which is adjacent to the center; and

WHEREAS, the Discovery Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization chartered in 1986; the center seeks to build a community that has the courage to ask thoughtful questions, the drive to find creative solutions, and the confidence to implement positive change, all with the goal of engaging curious minds that will fuel the future; and

WHEREAS, with an annual budget of \$1.2 million, the center is funded through a broad variety of sources, including earned income, door fees, and memberships, which account for approximately half of the organization's required revenue; the remaining half of the budget is met through donations, grants, individual and corporate sponsorship, and gifts; and

WHEREAS, the inception of the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring can be traced back to a grassroots effort led by Joe and Billie Little, who began to organize a hands-on museum for Murfreesboro in late 1985; their efforts led to the purchase of a building at 503 N. Maple Street, which was renovated and readied for visitors with the help of many generous volunteers and donors; and

WHEREAS, the Discovery House, as it was then called, opened its doors on March 3, 1987, with Billie Little serving as executive director; the 4,500-square-foot building hosted 11,000 guests in its first year, and that number soon greatly increased, precipitating the need for a larger facility; and

WHEREAS, in 1995, the Murfreesboro Water & Sewer Plant was vacated, a site that was adjacent to twenty acres of wetlands; possible repurposing of the building was studied, but it was determined that, for environmental reasons, the building should be demolished and a new edifice built to house the Discovery House; and

WHEREAS, two years later, the board of directors of the Discovery House began a campaign to raise \$1.8 million to fund the building of the new Discovery Center; the ground breaking was held on October 28, 2000, and the building project commenced, with the building design prepared by architect Jim Baily of Johnson & Bailey Architects and the landscape plan prepared by Lose and Associates of Nashville; and

WHEREAS, the grand opening of the 18,000-square-foot Discovery Center was held on August 2, 2002, with over 4,000 people in attendance; the museum reached 65,000 visitors in its first year; and

WHEREAS, four years later, the center was expanded through a \$1.8 million donation by members of the Christy-Houston Foundation; the center grew in size and scope with the generous monetary and artifact donations from Ed Delbridge, the Rebecca and Jennings Jones Foundation, Nissan North America, Greg and Minh-Triet Tucker, the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences, and numerous other corporations and individuals; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, the annual visitation surpassed 125,000, and in 2012, Tara MacDougall assumed leadership of the Discovery Center as the chief executive officer; the museum continued to thrive and grow, creating various engaging programs and exhibits; and

WHEREAS, the Discovery Center strives to expand its reach and make its programs accessible to all. A council was formed to help improve the museum experience for those with special needs; partnerships with schools have increased; and a STEAM Bus takes the museum experience to those in rural counties; and

WHEREAS, the Discovery Center owes its existence to those intrepid individuals who lent their support to its establishment from the beginning. In addition to Joe and Billie Little, museum founders include Doyle and Cindy Boyd, Joan and David Kellerman, Keith and Jill Shaver, Bob and Betsy Murfree, Rosalee Martin Landry, Ron and Jennifer Bombardi, Susan McDougall, and Lon and Christi Nuell; other early supporters include Mayor Joe B. Jackson, Bart and LeeAnne Walker, Chris and Mitzi Wyre, Donna and David Jones, Dan and Alicia Austin, Bob Parks, Bubba and Betty Anne Dempsey, and George and Marimae White; and

WHEREAS, for three decades, the Discovery Center has been a place where individuals young and old can explore, learn, and grow, and it is fitting that the museum be recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize and commend the Discovery Center at Murfree Spring on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, extending our gratitude for its impact on students and families throughout the State and our sincere best wishes for much continued success in the years to come.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.